

A narrative on The Hilgendorf Family written by Eileen Reynolds at the request of Lynn Krei, Oral History Project Director, of the Washakie County Museum.

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GEORGE A. HILGENDORF, whose ancestors were originally from German, was born in Davenport, Iowa. The family lived in Scottsbluff, Nebraska and Brush, Colorado where he met Florence V. Rupp of Hudson, Colorado at a dance. Her ancestors were English, Irish and German immigrants and came west via the Cumberland Gap. Her ancestors included Samuel Clemens (also known as Mark Twain). Florence was born in Pittsburgh, Kansas and lived also in Illinois and Colorado. They were married in Denver, October, 1919 and farmed in Hudson, Colorado where Eileen was born in 1921 and Eugene was born in Denver in 1924.

It was the beginning of the "Dust Bowl" days so they sold out and bought a new Overland car and headed north where they heard they would soon open up farm land in Moses Lake, Washington. George left Florence and the two kids off in Casper to visit grandmother, Carie Grof and her husband, Rudolph, who worked in the Midwest Oil fields just across from the famous "Tea Pot Dome" area.

George drove north arriving in this prosperous and bustling town of Worland. People were real friendly; agriculture looked good; so he went back and got his family and they officially arrived in town on May 6, 1926. The first house available was at 804 Culbertson. Houses were real scarce, but they moved several times the first year to better ones each time. Unload and load up became the norm.

George helped build the Worland Creamery where the Hotel Washakie had their parking lot later.

They enjoyed dancing in the old dance hall located where the Worland Liquor store is now.

Eileen started first grade in the Emmett Building. They they went to the Wostenberg farm south of Manderson and she rode the bus into Manderson often waiting hours after the bus driver practiced football. They farmed until "The Crash" forced them back into town.

George worked at the Buick Garage and at Holly Sugar Corporation during campaigns. Then finally he worked for the Town of Worland; cared for the community hall where the "big band" dances were held during the late thirties. He was then water meter man for 25 years until he retired in 1962. Everyone knew George and he knew everyone and their dogs. He used to tell some funny stories of homes and incidents around town.

Second son, Wayne, was born in February 1930 on a very cold night (40 below), the night the light plant burned down.

V. Phyllis, the youngest, was born in June, 1934. With older brothers and sister spoiling her as she was always so fine and petite.

Florence worked 16 years at the Wyoming Pure Seed Company, first as a picker, seed tester and for years as a supervisor over many women. Later she became a cook in the school system and soon she was head cook over the North Side School in the Watson building; later at east side school where later her two grandchildren ate school lunches there.

The family lived for years at 817 Robertson later building a home at 1404 Coburn. They saw the town grow and change a lot.

The kids remember the characters in the old jail (where the Community Hall is now) and where hobos stopped off at night and begged in the neighborhood. They had a real system.

Also, a fun spot was John Wessel's Blacksmith Shop where they were fascinated at the things he made and did for the farmers.

They played on the swings and slides over at the school ground; even venturing way up the fire escape occasionally (but we never went on top of the building and rang the bell as others did.)

Where Western Motors is, was the "cave" area. The neighborhood kids dug caves and connected them with tunnels.

Played games at night with the 27 kids in the neighborhood under the street lights at 9th and Robertson even hiding in the old ice house run by Babbitt and Walters located where the Town House Motel is now.

They loved to follow Don Srs.' ice truck and get ice shavings free. Today they call it "Shaved Ice" and you pay for it.

The circuses and carnivals came to town and often located on the lots between 9th and 10th on Big Horn Ave. All the kids in the neighborhood helped haul water in their wagons and boy did we get lots of free tickets. We were all workers.

The family had a large garden on the lots where the Pepsi-Cola head offices are now. We raised rabbits and chicken and canned all we ate...so we were among the fortunatue ones in the "30s".

We were a happy family that enjoyed camping in the mountains, picnicing in Thermopolis. Enjoyed baseball, basketball and football games and attended all of them. In the very early days we enjoyed the County Fairs, Washakie Days, Corn Shows, and Days of 49.

George was a good hunter and fisherman and taught the boys the sport. He always had his dog "Bing" with him as he drove around in his 1930 Model A. Ford. This car was restored and reved up and still in use by a collector.

Eileen enjoyed skating, reading, biking and piano.

Eugene was always a sports trainer for N.C.H.S. and thus went by the name of "Doc"

Hill until his untimely death in August, 1949 while working for PP&L Co.

V. Phyllis died following surgery in January, 1952. She was an honor student in the class of 1952. She was a good pianist and enjoyed reading. The whole family read lots and always used the County Library constantly and still do.

Eileen married Carl Reynolds in May, 1941 and they farmed east of town. They had two children. Stephen, currently of Ft. Collins, Colorado and Lynn Glanz of Riverton, Wyoming plus two grandchildren. Tiffany and Drew Glanz.

Wayne was always active in high school sports, being on several championship teams. Served in the Korean conflict. Married. Two sons, Terry of Lewistown, Montana and Greg of Seattle. Wayne returned to live in Worland after being in Billings several years as a teacher and coach in Central High.

In April, 1988-- Florence, who has traveled all over and on ocean cruises while she sold insurance for the Women's Benefit Association, is still enjoying reading, playing cards, sports activities and the many clubs she belongs to. Especially Senior Citizens activities. She attends the First Baptist Church where she has always been active in the women's work even back in the 1920s. She still maintains her own apartment and drives a car, and is still independent.

Submitted by Eileen Reynolds - April 4, 1988